

Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997

P.L. 105-89

Overview

H.R. 897

Enacted November 19, 1997

Purpose: To promote the adoption of children in foster care

This act amended title IV-E of the Social Security Act

Major Provisions of the Act

- **Reauthorized the Family Preservation and Support Services Program:**
 - Renamed it the Safe and Stable Families Program
 - Extended categories of service to include time-limited reunification services and adoption promotion and support services
- **Ensured safety for abused and neglected children:**
 - Ensured health and safety concerns are addressed when a State determines placement for abused and neglected children
 - Required HHS to report on the scope of substance abuse in the child welfare population, and the outcomes of services provided to that population
 - Added “safety of the child” to every step of the case plan and review process
 - Required criminal record checks for foster/adoptive parents who receive Federal funds on behalf of a child, unless a State opted out of this requirement
- **Accelerated permanent placement:**
 - Required States to initiate court proceedings to free a child for adoption once that child had been waiting in foster care for at least 12 of the most recent 22 months, unless there was an exception
 - Allowed children to be freed for adoption more quickly in extreme cases

Promoted adoptions:

 - Rewarded States that increased adoptions with incentive funds
 - Required states to use reasonable efforts to move eligible foster care children towards permanent placements
 - Promoted adoptions of all special needs children and ensured health coverage for adopted special needs children
 - Prohibited States from delaying/denying placements of children based on the geographic location of the prospective adoptive families
 - Required States to document and report child-specific adoption efforts

- **Increased accountability:**
 - Required HHS to establish new outcome measures to monitor and approve State performance
 - Required States to document child-specific efforts to move children into adoptive homes
- **Clarified “reasonable efforts:”**
 - Emphasized children’s health and safety
 - Required States to specify situations when services prevent foster placement and reunification of families are not required
- **Required shorter time limits for making decision about permanent placements:**
 - Required permanency hearings to be held no later than 12 months after entering foster care
 - Required States to initiate termination of parental rights proceedings after the child has been in foster care 15 of the previous 22 months, except if not in the best interest of the child, or if the child is the care of a relative